

# A Quick Guide To Safe Food Handling

This booklet tells you what to do at each step in food handling—from shopping to storing leftovers—to avoid food poisoning.

Never had food poisoning?

Actually, it's called foodborne illness. Perhaps you have, but thought you were sick with the flu. Some *7 million* Americans will suffer from foodborne illness this year.

Why? Because at the right temperature, bacteria you can't see, smell or taste can multiply to the millions in a few short hours. In large numbers, they cause illness.

It doesn't have to happen, though. Some *85 percent* of cases could be avoided if people just handled food properly. So here's what to do...



## When You Shop

### Buy cold food last, get it home fast

- When you're out, grocery shop last. Take food straight home to the refrigerator. Never leave food in a hot car!
- Don't buy anything you won't use before the use-by date.
- Don't buy food in poor condition. Make sure refrigerated food is cold to the touch. Frozen food should be rock-solid. Canned good should be free of dents, cracks or bulging lids which can indicate a serious food poisoning threat.

## When You Store Food

### Keep it safe, refrigerate

Check the temperature of your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer you can buy at a variety or hardware store. To keep bacteria in check, the refrigerator should run at 40 F; the freezer unit at 0 F. Generally, keep your refrigerator as cold as possible without freezing your milk or lettuce.

- Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish immediately if you can't use it within a few days.

Put packages of raw meat, poultry or fish on a plate before refrigerating so their juices won't drip on other food. Raw juices often contain bacteria.

## When You Prepare Food

### Keep everything clean & Thaw in refrigerator

- Wash hands in hot soapy water before preparing food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food. For instance, wash your hands, cutting board and knife in hot soapy water after cutting up the chicken and before dicing salad ingredients.
- Use plastic cutting boards rather than wooden ones where bacteria can hide in grooves.

- Thaw food in the microwave or refrigerator, NOT on the kitchen counter. The danger? Bacteria can grow in the outer layers of the food before the inside thaws. Marinate in the refrigerator top.

## When You're Cooking

### Cook thoroughly

It takes thorough cooking to kill harmful bacteria, so you're taking chances when you eat meat, poultry, fish or eggs that are raw or only partly cooked. Plus, hamburger that is red in the middle, rare and medium-rare steak and roast beef are also undercooked from the safety standpoint.

- Cook red meat to 160 F. Cook poultry to 180 F. Use a meat thermometer to check that it's cooked all the way through.
- to check visually, red meat is done when it's brown or gray inside. Poultry juices run clear. Fish flakes with a fork.
- Salmonella, a bacteria that causes food poisoning, can grow inside fresh, unbroken eggs. So cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm, not runny. Scramble eggs to a firm texture. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or only partially cooked.
- When you cook ahead, divide large portions of food into small, shallow containers for refrigeration. This ensures safe, rapid cooling.

## Safe Microwaving

A great time-saver, the microwave has one food safety disadvantage. It sometimes leaves cold spots in food. Bacteria can survive in these spots. So...

- Cover food with a lid or plastic wrap so steam can aid thorough cooking. Vent wrap and make sure it doesn't touch the food.
- Stir and rotate your food for even cooking. No turntable? Rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.
- Observe the standing time called for in a recipe or package directions. During the standing time, food finishes cooking.

## When You Serve Food

### Never leave it out over 2 hours

Use clean dishes and utensils to serve food, not those used in preparation. serve grilled food on a clean plate too, not one that held raw meat, poultry or fish.

Never leave perishable food out of the refrigerator over 2 hours! Bacteria that can cause food poisoning grow quickly at warm temperatures.

- Pack lunches in insulated carriers with a cold pack. Caution children never to leave lunches in direct sun or on a warm radiator.
- Carry picnic food in a cooler with a cold pack. When possible, put the cooler in the shade. Keep the lid on as much as you can.
- Party time? Keep cold party food on ice or serve it throughout the gathering from platters from the refrigerator.

Likewise, divide hot party food into smaller serving platters. Keep platters refrigerated until time to warm them up for serving.

## When You Handle Leftovers

### Use small containers for quick cooling

- Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. Don't pack the refrigerator - cool air must circulate to keep food safe.
- With poultry or other stuffed meats remove stuffing and refrigerate it in separate containers.

## Reheating

- Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to 165 F.
- Microwave leftovers using a lid or vented plastic wrap for thorough heating.

## Kept It Too Long?

### When in doubt, throw it out

Safe refrigerator and freezer storage time-limits are given for many common foods in the "Cold Storage" table inside this booklet. But what about something you totally forgot about and may have kept too long?

- Danger - never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it. Just discard it.
- Is it Moldy? The mold you see is only the tip of the iceberg. The poisons molds can form are found under the surface of the food. so, while you can sometimes save hard cheese and salamis and firm fruits and vegetables by cutting the mold out - remove a large area around it, most moldy food should be discarded.

## Power's Out

### Your freezer

Without power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen 1 day.

If power will be coming back on fairly soon, you can make the food last longer by keeping the door shut as much as possible.

If power will be off for an extended period, take food to friends' freezers, locate a commercial freezer or use dry ice.

### Your refrigerator-freezer combination

- Without power, the refrigerator section will keep food cool 4-6 hours depending on the kitchen temperature.
- A full, well-functioning freezer unit should keep food frozen for 2 days. A half-full freezer unit should keep things frozen about 1 day.
- Block ice can keep food on the refrigerator shelves cooler. Dry ice can be added to the freezer unit. You can't touch dry ice and you shouldn't breathe the fumes, so follow handling directions carefully.

### Thawed food

- Food still containing ice crystals or that feels refrigerator-cold can be refrozen.
- discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there 2 hours or more. Immediately discard anything with a strange color or odor.

## Is It Food Poisoning?

### When to report foodborne illness

You or your physician should report serious cases of foodborne illness to the local health department. Report any food poisoning incidents if the food involved came from a restaurant or commercial outlet. Give a detailed, but short account of the incident. If the food is a commercial product, have it in hand so you can describe it. If you're asked to keep the food refrigerated so officials can examine it later, follow directions carefully.